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SYMBOLIC CONNECTION BETWEEN HUMAN AND DATE PALM IN VISUAL ARTS

Abstract. The article examines the significance of the date palm as a symbol of human life in visual arts and various cultures. In ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Islamic cultures, the date palm symbolized life, rebirth, and fertility. Examples from the Quran, referencing the date palm in relation to birth and fertility, emphasize its mystical and biological significance. The article portrays the date palm as a symbol of life cycles, harmony, and resilience, deeply intertwined with human experiences. The symbolism of the date palm, reflecting human life, is recognized as a universal symbol across various cultures. Its harmony with nature and humanity conveys a message of resilience and hope. The date palm serves as a unifying element of cultures, art, and spirituality.

Key words: date palm, symbolism, visual arts, tree of life, harmony.

Introduction. Nature is not only a physical but also a spiritual space in human life. Human experiences, emotions, and thoughts are often expressed through various elements of nature. The date palm, in particular, stands as a special symbol of this connection. Since ancient times, the date palm has been regarded not only as a fruitful tree but also as a symbol of life, rebirth, patience, and resilience.

In Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Arab cultures, it has held significant religious and economic roles, impacting not only local life but also serving as a bridge for intercultural values. Its deep-rooted history is reflected even in the earliest written records of humanity. According to the theory of symbolism,

elements of nature are also used to represent specific aspects of human life. Within this context, the date palm carries both universal and culturally specific meanings.

Structurally, the date palm is considered the plant that most closely resembles humans in the world. Some ancient sources even suggest that the remaining soil from which Adam (AS) was created was used to form the date palm.

In ancient Egypt, the date palm symbolized immortality and rebirth. Depictions of the date palm were widely used in pharaohs' tombs and on the walls of temples. Notably, it played a symbolic role in scenes related to belief in life after death.

In Mesopotamia, the date palm was regarded as a symbol of fertility and life. The oldest clay tablets contain depictions of the date palm. In this region, the date palm was not only a source of food but also served as a construction material used in architecture. In Babylonian mythology, the tree was considered an embodiment of divine wisdom and abundance.

The interpretation of the main material. Researchers such as P. Popenoe and M. Giovino argue that the depiction of the «tree of life» or the «sacred tree» in Mesopotamia actually represents the date palm. Beyond the symbolism that directly sanctifies the palm, its association with divine figures underscores its special status in Mesopotamia (Fig. 3). In this context, the relationship between Inanna and Dumuzi provides significant insights. One breathes life into the palm, transforming it into fruit, while the other protects and preserves these fruits.

In the palace structures of the Neo-Assyrian Period, the date palm is depicted on seals, drawings, and reliefs—sometimes as part of a natural landscape, and at other times as a «sacred tree» imbued with religious meaning.

The presence of the date palm in Mesopotamia, initially rooted in its importance as a vital food source for the region, eventually evolved into a sacred role with religious functions. In Mesopotamian religious life, the date palm was associated with deities such as Dumuzi, Inanna/Ishtar, and Mulissu, gaining a profound spiritual significance. The palm was linked to concepts of femininity and masculinity, identified with the god Dumuzi and the goddess Inanna, and, as previously mentioned, directly connected to Inanna/Ishtar's blessings.

A symbol of birth and creation, the date palm stands alongside cedar and tamarisk as one of the most frequently mentioned trees in ancient texts. The

shared characteristic of these three trees is their purifying qualities, often associated with various rituals. For instance, the presence of the date palm in magical texts concerning difficult childbirths is particularly intriguing. In such cases, referred to as *Sinnistu la musedertu* («woman with difficult labor»), the date palm is depicted as both an entity capable of absorbing the woman's pain and a source of strength she can rely on.

Scientific research supports the notion that dates are a natural aid for facilitating childbirth and aiding postpartum recovery for women. Additionally, modern medical studies reveal that dates enhance the quality and quantity of breast milk during the lactation period.

The connection between women and the date palm in Mesopotamia is evident in both the relief at Qaratape and the depiction of childbirth in a Greek myth, suggesting that ancient civilizations had already observed and utilized these properties through practical experience [4].



Fig. 1. The relief of a breastfeeding woman, Turkey, Qaratape.

The references in verses 23-26 of Surah Maryam in the Quran also exemplify this connection, where Maryam leans against a date palm to give birth to Jesus. The angel Gabriel descends and instructs her to shake the date palm as a divine blessing, so she can eat from its fruits. The Quran describes the event as follows: 23: «The pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a date palm. She said, ‘Oh, if only I had died before this and was a thing long forgotten!’ 24: But he [Jesus or Gabriel] called to her from below her, ‘Do not grieve; your Lord has provided a stream beneath you. 25: And shake the trunk of the date palm towards you; it will drop fresh, ripe dates upon you. 26: So eat and drink and be comforted. And if you see any human, say, ‘I have vowed a fast to the Most Merciful, so I will not speak today to anyone’ [2].



Fig. 2. An illustration by a Muslim artist depicting Maryam.

You cannot grow a date palm from a seed. Female date palms, much like women, reproduce by «bringing offspring into the world.» There are two types of propagation: one is natural, and the other is akin to a cesarean section. The date palm seems to perform a form of cesarean birth. Small offshoots emerging from its trunk are surgically removed with special tools and planted in a location visible to the mother tree.

Just as a newborn needs its mother, the new offshoot of a date palm also requires the presence of its mother tree nearby. You must plant the new sapling within the mother's sight. Otherwise, the offspring dies, and the mother «takes offense» and ceases to bear fruit.



Fig. 3. A soft stone vessel depicting a probable scene of date palm propagation, 3rd millennium BCE, Damascus National Museum [1].

A Symbol of Life. The date palm represents the cyclical nature of life in various cultures. Its roots extend deep into the earth, symbolizing stability, its trunk embodies patience and resilience, and its branches reflect the ever-renewing energy of life.

The lifespan of a date palm is approximately 60-70 years, akin to that of a human. The topmost part of the tree is its «head.» Just as a human dies when the head is severed, a date palm also perishes if its crown is removed. A strong

blow to the trunk can kill the tree. Like humans, the heart of the date palm lies within its trunk, and a fatal impact there results in its death.

A Symbol of Abundance and Fertility. The most fruitful period of a date palm, much like humans, is between the ages of 15 and 40. Particularly in hot and challenging climates, the date palm ensures the continuity of life and stands as a symbol of fertility. In many societies, it is associated with family, prosperity, and harmony.

Cosmic Harmony. The shape of the date palm—with its sturdy trunk and branches reaching towards the sky—symbolizes humanity's connection to nature and the cosmos. This imagery is often used in visual arts and literature to express the human quest for inner harmony. A vivid example can be seen in classic illustrations depicting lovers reunited in a date grove.



Fig. 4. The Meeting of Lovers in a Date Grove.
«The Treasury of Mysteries».

A Symbol of Resilience and Hope. The date palm, capable of thriving in harsh conditions, particularly in deserts, serves as an inspiration for resilience and hope. Its life cycle and fertility are often seen as metaphors for overcoming life's challenges.

A Symbol of Eternity. In cultures that believe in life after death, the date palm represents rebirth and eternity.

The Date Palm on Tombstones. The date palm is often depicted on tombstones, particularly for women, symbolizing their sensitivity. A tombstone featuring a date palm also signifies that the deceased had fulfilled the pilgrimage obligation during their lifetime [3].



Fig. 5. Ottoman Tombstone, Turkey.

The date palm symbolizes human experience: its strong roots, resilience, longevity, and ability to bear fruit under challenging conditions embody humanity's capacity to survive and thrive.

Conclusion. Ultimately, the «Tree of Life» has been widely used as a symbol of life, abundance, and connection with the spiritual realm throughout humanity's journey to understand the world, from the Stone Age to the present. The universal role of this symbol across all cultures, transcending race, religion, and nationality, offers significant evidence of the unifying power of the «Tree» cult for humanity.

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TƏSVİRİ SƏNƏTDƏ İNSAN VƏ XURMA AĞACININ SİMVOLİK BAĞLILIĞI

Məqalə xurma ağacının təsviri sənət və müxtəlif mədəniyyətlərdə insan həyatının simvolu kimi əhəmiyyətini araşdırır. Xurma ağacı qədim Misir, Mesopotamiya və İslam mədəniyyətlərində həyat, yenidən doğuş və məhsuldarlıq rəmzi kimi mühüm yer tutmuşdur. Məryəm surəsində xurma ağacına istinadla bağlı Qurani-Kərimdən gətirilən nümunələr, həmçinin qədim dövrlərdə xurmanın doğum və məhsuldarlıqla əlaqəsi, bu ağacın həm mistik, həm də bioloji xüsusiyyətlərini vurğulayır. Məqalə xurma ağacını həyat dövrü, harmoniya və davamlılıq rəmzi kimi göstərərək, onun insan təcrübəsi ilə möhkəm əlaqəsini təsvir edir. Xurma ağacının insan həyatını əks etdirən simvolizmi, müxtəlif mədəniyyətlərdə universal bir rənz olaraq qəbul edilir. Onun təbiətlə və insanla harmoniyası, davamlılıq və ümid mesajı ötürür. Xurma ağacı təkcə mədəniyyətlərin deyil, həm də sənətin və mədəniyyətin birləşdirici elementi kimi çıxış edir.

Açar sözlər: Xurma ağacı, simvolizm, təsviri sənət, həyat ağacı, harmoniya.

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СИМВОЛИЧЕСКАЯ СВЯЗЬ ЧЕЛОВЕКА И ФИНИКОВОЙ ПАЛЬМЫ В ИЗОБРАЗИТЕЛЬНОМ ИСКУССТВЕ

Статья исследует значение финиковой пальмы как символа человеческой жизни в изобразительном искусстве и различных культурах. В культурах Древнего Египта, Месопотамии и исламского мира пальма рассматривалась как символ жизни, возрождения и плодородия. Примеры из Корана, где упоминается пальма, и связь этого дерева с рождением и плодородием подчёркивают его мистические и биологические свойства. В статье пальма представлена как символ жизненного цикла, гармонии и устойчивости, тесно связанный с человеческим опытом. Символизм финиковой пальмы, отражающий человеческую жизнь, воспринимается как универсальный символ в различных культурах. Её гармония с природой и человеком передаёт послание устойчивости и надежды. Финиковая пальма выступает объединяющим элементом не только культур, но и искусства и духовности.

Ключевые слова: финиковая пальма, символизм, изобразительное искусство, дерево жизни, гармония.